United Nations

Daily Highlights

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1 December 1993

WEDNESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

• Georgian and Abkhaz sides, meeting in Geneva, agree to cease-fire while talks continue on ending Abkhazia conflict; say extra international observers and use of peace-keepers would promote peace; POWs to be exchanged by 20 December and refugees to be allowed to return home.

• Marking World AIDS Day, Secretary-General calls for worldwide mobilization against AIDS; says United Nations will do more to combat epidemic; WHO reports that sex education leads to safer sexual practices among young people.

• Third Committee approves draft declaration on elimination of violence against women by which General Assembly would call on States not to invoke any custom to avoid obligation to combat such violence.

• Secretary-General tells World Bank conference that lack of political will is major cause of global hunger; international community, working with United Nations, should act to guarantee basic right of survival.

• Panel of High-level Personalities on African Development to begin third meeting at Headquarters tomorrow.

• United Nations to hold donors conference on re-establishment of Somali police beginning tomorrow in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

• Special Political and Decolonization Committee concludes peace-keeping review by approving draft resolutions on improving command and control of United Nations operations and protecting peace-keepers.

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Georgian and Abkhaz representatives meeting in Geneva today agreed not to use force or the threat of force against each other while negotiations to achieve a comprehensive political settlement of the conflict in Abkhazia are continuing. The agreement, which was in accordance with the Sochi Agreement of 27 July on the cease-fire in Abkhazia, was contained in a Memorandum of Understanding concluded after two days of talks. The two sides also agreed

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that the maintenance of peace would be promoted by an increase in the number of international observers in the conflict zone and by the use of international peace-keeping forces, subject to agreement by the Security Council and the Secretary-General.

As a gesture of good will, the parties agreed to exchange all prisoners-of-war before 20 December without any preconditions. They further undertook to create conditions for the safe and speedy return of refugees in all regions of Abkhazia. It was also agreed that a group of experts including representatives of the parties, the United Nations, the Russian Federation and the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) will begin work in early December to prepare recommendations on the political status of Abkhazia.

The Geneva meeting was held under the aegis of the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Georgia, Edouard Brunner. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Boris Pastukhov attended as facilitator, and a CSCE observer was also present. The next round of United Nations-sponsored negotiations to settle the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict will begin on 11 January 1994 in Moscow or Geneva.

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In a statement on the occasion of World AIDS Day, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali today called for worldwide mobilization against acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS), describing it as a threat to everyone. He pointed out that over 14 million people have been infected by it and that that number could exceed 40 million by the end of the decade. The United Nations would do more to combat the epidemic, he stated.

A report by the World Health Organization Global Programme on AIDS, issued today to mark World AIDS Day, quotes evidence that sex education in schools leads to the adoption of safer sexual practices in young people. The report, based on 35 different studies, shows that sex education leads either to a delay in starting sexual activity or to a decrease in overall sexual activity, and that access to counselling and contraceptive services does not encourage earlier or increased sexual activity.

The most recent study, conducted among 1,800 boys in the United States aged between 15 and 19, found that the majority of them had received formal instruction on AIDS, birth control, and resisting pressure for sexual intercourse. This was associated with a decreased number of sexual partners, frequency of intercourse and increased condom use. The findings are considered significant because the WHO Global Programme on AIDS estimates that at least half of all HIV infections worldwide have occurred in people between the ages of 15 and 24. More than 1 billion people -- one fifth of the world's population -- are in this age range.

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The Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian and Cultural) today approved a draft declaration on the elimination of violence against women by which the General Assembly would call on States to refrain from invoking any custom,

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tradition or religious consideration to avoid their obligation to eliminate such violence.

The draft defines violence against women as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life". It states that women are entitled to the equal enjoyment and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil and other fields and sets out a 17-point policy for States to pursue.

Under the terms of another draft adopted this morning, the Secretary-General would be urged to fully implement the plan of action to improve the status of women in the Secretariat by 1995. He would be urged to consider such measures as job-sharing, flexible working hours, child-care arrangements, career-break schemes and access to training, and would be requested to develop comprehensive policy measures aimed at preventing sexual harassment in the Secretariat.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali told the World Bank conference on overcoming global hunger in Washington yesterday that the major cause of hunger was the lack of political will to deal with the problem, but that he was encouraged by signs that that was changing. The world now produced enough food to feed its population, but there was still the problem of access to food supplies, of distribution and of entitlement.

If hunger caused by crises required emergency relief, hunger caused by poverty should be the target of development efforts, the Secretary-General said. He noted that in this respect a great deal had been achieved. As a proportion of the world population, fewer people were hungry today than at any other time in history. Except in sub-Saharan Africa, nutritional trends had improved in all regions of the world.

However, the Secretary-General continued, 800 million people still suffered from insufficient or poor nutrition. Hunger was a violation of the most basic of human rights -- the right to survival -- and it was the responsibility of the international community to guarantee that right. The United Nations was central to that task because the solutions had to be comprehensive, integrating the social, economic and technological factors. Above all, Mr. Boutros-Ghali stated, food security had to be guided by a political consensus on the need for action.

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The Panel of High-level Personalities on African Development will begin its third meeting tomorrow at Headquarters under the chairmanship of Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali. Among the topics to be discussed at

the two-day meeting will be conditions conducive to long-term development in Africa, the links between security and development in the continent, regional integration and cooperation, and diversification of African economies.

The Panel of High-level Personalities was appointed by the Secretary-General in December 1992 to advise him on the implementation of the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s. The Agenda, which was adopted by the General Assembly in December 1991, embodies mutually reinforcing responsibilities and commitments by Africa and the international community to foster the continent's economic recovery and development.

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A United Nations-sponsored conference for donor countries interested in providing resources for the re-establishment of the Somali police will begin tomorrow in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The three-day conference will provide donors with information on the status of the Somali police, ensure coordination on resources needed and provided, and ensure that a strategy for efficient use of contributions is in place.

International organizations, such as the European Community, and United Nations agencies, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Food Programme (WFP), have expressed concern about and provided resources for the re-establishment of the Somali police. Assessments conducted by the United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM II) and individual donor countries with the Somali police show that equipment for transportation, communications, police stations and individual officers -- including uniforms and weapons -- are needed in all regions of the country.

Conference participants will include representatives from Egypt, Germany, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Nigeria, Sweden, United Kingdom, United States, the UNDP and the European Community.

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The Fourth Committee (Special Political and Decolonization) yesterday concluded its comprehensive review of peace-keeping by approving recommendations for strengthening the command and control structure of United Nations peace-keeping operations and for protecting peace-keeping personnel. Acting without a vote, the Committee approved one draft resolution which would have the General Assembly urge the Secretary-General to initiate a review to assure the unity of command and control needed for successful peace-keeping and to improve the information flow and coordination between Headquarters and field missions.

A second draft resolution stressed the need to strengthen Secretariat command and control of peace-keeping operations based on clearly established lines of command. It would have the Assembly call on the Secretary-General, in cooperation with the Security Council and troop-contributing countries, to strengthen arrangements for political direction and military command and

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control. It would call for improved coordination with humanitarian and civilian aspects of peace-keeping operations. The draft also covered such peace-keeping issues as resources and finances, organization and effectiveness, issues arising from "An Agenda for Peace" and the status and safety of United Nations peace-keeping personnel.

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2 December 1993

THURSDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ Secretary-General, addressing High-level Panel on African Development, says long-term development cannot be achieved amid instability and conflict; stresses need for broad-based regional cooperation in economic and political spheres.

+ Stating that "time is running out", participants in Addis Ababa Meeting on Humanitarian Assistance for Somalia sign Declaration of intent with view to establishing six-month plan of action by year's end.

+ United States tells Fifth Committee that overall proposed programme budget for biennium 1994-1995 is too high; proposes operational cuts amounting to $100 million.

+ Secretary-General to separate functions of Special Representative for former Yugoslavia and Co-Chairman of International Conference; Yasushi Akashi to be new Special Representative, Thorvald Stoltenberg to remain Co-Chairman.

+ Israel tells General Assembly that summit between Syrian President and Israeli Prime Minister would aid Middle East peace process; seeks comprehensive peace, with separate treaties with all Arab and Muslim countries; Egypt cites Camp David Accords as example to follow.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali today told the Panel of High-level Personalities on African Development that there was a growing awareness that the continent's problems required global attention. However, drawing attention to those problems did not by itself produce solutions. Words still had to be transformed into action. Africa's recent history had clearly shown that peace, stability and security were prerequisites for development. Time and again, unrest and conflict had destroyed in a few months progress that had taken years to achieve.

Political conflict in Somalia had cost hundreds of thousands of lives, destroyed infrastructure and wiped out productive capacity, the

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Secretary-General continued. Elsewhere on the continent, instability discouraged investment and unrest deterred assistance. Long-term development could not be achieved in such an atmosphere. Instead, a stable modus vivendi had to be found for each society. He stressed the importance of broad-based regional cooperation and integration in the economic and political spheres. Excessive spending on defence must be tackled, and greater emphasis placed on more productive sectors of society. Political will alone could not guarantee results. International assistance was needed in dealing with such matters as access to markets, debt relief and technology transfer.

The Panel of High-level Personalities, which was appointed by the Secretary-General in December 1992 to advise him on the implementation of the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s, will conclude its two-day meeting tomorrow.

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The Fourth Coordination Meeting on Humanitarian Assistance for Somalia concluded yesterday in Addis Ababa with the signing of a Declaration of goals and principles to be translated into a six-month plan of action before the end of the year. Participants agreed that "time is running out", both in terms of the endurance of the Somali people in their search for sustainable solutions to their desperate situation, and in terms of international patience and funding. The way forward had to be determined by the Somali people themselves, with recognition that assistance would be directed to those areas where stability and security had been attained, and where the involvement of elders, local non-governmental organizations and representatives of the international community was allowed.

In order to move forward effectively, the participants agreed to a division of responsibilities between the Somali people, the donor community, the United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM II), United Nations agencies and programmes and NGOs. They committed themselves to work under the guidance of the Development Council, a body composed of representatives of the various Somali Regional Development Committees, to produce sectoral strategies consistent with long-term sustainable development.

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The representative of the United States told the Fifth Committee (Administrative and Budgetary) today that the overall proposed programme budget for the biennium 1994-1995 was too high. Member States had set a budget outline that established an overall resource level of $2.702 billion for the biennium. The budget submitted by the Secretary-General was $47 million higher, which was unacceptable. He proposed operational cuts in such areas as expenses for office furniture, publications, maintenance and travel costs, in order to trim $100 million from the overall budget.

However, the United States representative went on to say, allocations for specific programmes such as peace-keeping, humanitarian assistance, the environment and human rights, were insufficient. He called on the Assembly to

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support a budget that would energize the United Nations human rights programme, and said the imbalance between peace-keeping needs and capabilities should be redressed.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has decided to separate the function of Special Representative for the former Yugoslavia from that of Co-Chairman of the International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia, a United Nations spokesman said today. Both of those functions are currently fulfilled by Thorvald Stoltenberg. Mr. Stoltenberg will remain Co-Chairman of the International Conference, while Yasushi Akashi, formerly Special Representative for Cambodia, will be the new Special Representative for the former Yugoslavia and Chief of Mission of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR).

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Israel told the General Assembly yesterday that the Middle East peace process would be greatly helped by a summit in Damascus or Jerusalem between President Assad of Syria and Prime Minister Rabin of Israel. "Let us create another psychological and political breakthrough, as Egyptian President Sadat did when he came to Jerusalem in November 1977," the Israeli representative told the Assembly as it began its consideration of the situation in the Middle East. He called on King Hussein of Jordan to sign a peace treaty with Israel and said Israel wanted a comprehensive peace, based on separate treaties with the Gulf and North African States, and all other Arab and Muslim countries.

Egypt said the Camp David Accords between Egypt and Israel remained a historic moment in the Middle East peace process, as well as an example for others to follow. If that pioneering experiment had not succeeded, subsequent experiments would not have succeeded either. As a result of its own experiences in the peace process, Egypt supported the bilateral and multilateral negotiations.

Saudi Arabia said peace in the Middle East required a solution of the question of Jerusalem. A recent decision of the Israeli Supreme Court stating that any ruling changing the status of the holy city would be considered null and void, was a blatant violation of Security Council resolutions. Israel must show its good will by building confidence, and the question of settlements must also be addressed, according to Saudi Arabia.

The representative of Jordan said that despite possible setbacks, "we are on the right track, that the long-standing struggle of the Palestinian people has started to bear fruit, that the parties involved in the peace process remain committed to their peace obligation, and that they have agreed to inscribe all those issues in the agenda for negotiations".

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FRIDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ General Assembly President says UNRWA assistance is vital to Palestinian people in transition period following PLO-Israel accords; appeals for international financial support, citing shortfall in contributions to Agency last year.

+ Department of Humanitarian Affairs launches inter-agency appeal on behalf of 250,000 people in war-torn Georgia; seeks $20 million to cover needs from 1 December to 31 May 1994.

+ Citing progress which could lead to implementation of United Nations peace-keeping plan for Croatia, Secretary-General says Security Council should not reconsider UNPROFOR mandate at this time.

+ General Assembly establishes open-ended Working Group to consider question of representation on and membership of Security Council; first meeting to be convened towards end of January 1994.

+ International Day of Disabled Persons observed today; focus this year on creation of society in which all citizens, regardless of levels of ability, can claim rights and exercise responsibilities.

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General Assembly President Samuel Insanally (Guyana) said today that despite the hope created by the accords between the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Israel, the humanitarian assistance provided by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) was still needed. The United Nations would have a significant role to play in supporting the accords and in assisting the Palestinians in the transition to self-rule, he told the Ad Hoc Committee for the announcement of voluntary contributions to UNRWA. It was essential, therefore, that UNRWA's services continue without interruption at existing or enhanced levels.

UNRWA had already identified projects and programmes which would build confidence, create employment and improve the daily lives of people in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, Mr. Insanally continued. He noted that whatever

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the situation in those areas, there were also more than 1.7 million refugees living outside the occupied territories, in Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic.

For 1994, UNRWA had presented budget proposals totalling some $294 million to the General Assembly, he said. A shortfall in contributions last year had resulted in an austerity programme which had cut the budget deficit to some $4 million. However, such measures could not be sustained without a serious deterioration in UNRWA's services. International financial support for United Nations programmes for the Palestinian people was needed now more than ever, and pledges made in the Committee would be a significant gesture for peace.

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A United Nations inter-agency consolidated appeal was launched today by the Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA) to meet the emergency needs of 250,000 people in war-torn Georgia, including 150,000 displaced people and returnees. These are in addition to the 100,000 who escaped some time ago from conflict areas in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and who still require urgent humanitarian assistance. The new appeal supersedes the one launched in March 1993 and focuses on emergency requirements from 1 December 1993 to 31 May 1994, the costs of which are estimated at $20 million.

In September/October 1993, civil war in Abkhazia forced part of the population, mainly Georgian families, to flee, crossing the mountains in hazardous conditions. On 6 October, DHA issued a special emergency appeal for $2.8 million to cover their immediate relief needs. That appeal was fully met and thousands of people left the mountains. But according to the Department, further urgent requirements have arisen as a result of the impending winter and the increase in the number of displaced people.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has said that various initiatives are underway with the cooperation of the two sides in the Croatian conflict which could lead to implementation of the United Nations peace-keeping plan for the Republic. Consequently, the Secretary-General said in a report dated 1 November, he would not recommend that the Security Council reconsider the mandate of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) at this time. However, he warned that the two sides had to work harder to achieve a cease-fire agreement, better economic cooperation and a political settlement if the international community was to sustain its peacemaking and peace-keeping commitment in Croatia. He appealed to them to extend their cooperation to UNPROFOR as it sought to improve conditions in the United Nations Protected Areas (UNPAs).

The Secretary-General noted that talks aimed at a cease-fire in and around the UNPAs were continuing within the framework of the International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia. It was also hoped that talks would lead to economic confidence-building measures. He also noted that UNPROPOR had

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initiated meetings between the two sides' military commanders in all sectors, and was increasingly active in identifying humanitarian needs and in assisting humanitarian deliveries.

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The General Assembly today established an open-ended Working Group to consider the question of equitable representation on and increase in the membership of the Security Council, as well as others matters related to the Council. Acting without a vote, the Assembly requested that the Working Group report on the progress of its work before the end of the forty-eighth session.

General Assembly President S.R. Insanally (Guyana) said he would convene the Working Group's first meeting towards the end of January 1994. The Group would consider the views of Member States on the subject, as expressed in the plenary or in their written replies to the Secretary-General.

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The International Day of Disabled Persons was observed today at the national and international level, the second observance of the Day as proclaimed by the General Assembly at the conclusion of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons (1983-1992). It falls on the anniversary of the adoption in 1982 of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons and the focus this year is on creating a society where all people, regardless of their level of ability, have an equal chance to contribute and to claim their rights and exercise their responsibilities. The approach emphasizes ability rather than disability, and integration as opposed to segregation.

The General Assembly is expected this month to adopt a set of standard rules aimed at equalizing opportunity for for people with disabilities. The rules would provide Governments with policy options and ideas for the mechanisms necessary to create a society in which all its citizens can participate.

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